

REVIEW

Mojave Desert Wildflowers. Jon Mark Stewart. 1998. vi + 210 pages. \$14.95. Published by the author. ISBN 0-9634909-1-5.

Mojave Desert Wildflowers is the second offering of photographer Jon Mark Stewart, following his *Colorado Desert Wildflowers*. Stewart fell under the spell of desert botany while a student, and he has maintained his interests through his photography. *Mojave Desert Wildflowers* is a recent addition to a wide array of photographic guides to plants of desert regions. The goals of most such guides include 1) provide an easy means to identify plants via photographs and/or drawings, and 2) display the beauty of form and color in the plants of the desert. Attainment of both of these goals, and the quality of the reproduction, varies from guide to guide, but Stewart's new addition is a notable success. Here is produced a set of very good photographs of many of the commoner, and several less common species that inhabit the Mojave Desert. What caught my attention immediately was the exceptional quality of most of the photos. They are in focus with great depth of field, brightness and contrast are very good, and the color of the plants is true. Too often photos in field guides, whether due to inadequate originals or diminished reproduction, appear over- or underexposed. Bright yellow or white flowers are especially difficult to photograph for publication without seeming glary. Not so in this book. Field guides, to be useful, must show clearly the details that distinguish and differentiate species, and in this aspect Stewart succeeds.

Mojave Desert Wildflowers covers 195 species organized by flower color, with the exception of the cacti, which are contained in their own chapter. The taxonomy

follows The Jepson Manual (1993), the most recent comprehensive flora of the region. In the back of the book there is a useful cross-list of names used by Munz' Flora of California (1959) and Kearney and Peebles' Flora of Arizona (1960), for those of us who learned the names of desert plants prior to 1993. I didn't notice a reference to where Stewart got his common names, but I suspect that many of them came from Jaeger's (1940) Desert Wild Flowers. As is common with wildflower guides, common names of the better known species are well-known and widely accepted, while those of lesser known species often appear to be forced on the species. For example, *Linanthus parryae* is called "Parry gilia", dating from the 19th century when all species of *Linanthus* were recognized as species of *Gilia*. I doubt if (m)any botanists today would actually call *L. parryae* by that name. Nonetheless, as there are no rules by which use of common names are followed, any common name appears fair game.

At the end of the book there is a page describing the film, equipment, and methods used in the photography. I enjoyed reading about this—not so much because I use essentially the same materials as Stewart, but because I can have hope that someday I might be able to achieve the high standard of photography that is present in this book.

I took this book with my plant taxonomy class to the Mojave Desert, and the consensus among these advanced students of botany was that it was a keeper. Among the wide assortment of picture books *Mojave Desert Wildflowers* stands out. I recommend the book to all who collect and use field guides to desert plants.

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